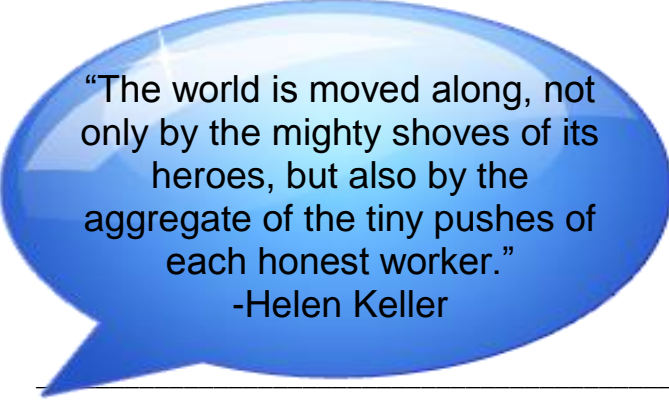


DPI VISTA Monthly

December 2009



"The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker."

-Helen Keller

Jane Grinde

Project Director

Betsy Prueter

Project Coordinator

Ruth Anne Landsverk

Family Education Coordinator

Penny Bruskin

VISTA Leader

Casey Gauthier

VISTA Leader, Editor

Welcome New VISTAs!

We are thrilled to have two new VISTAs serving on our Project! Casey Burns and Ellen Carpenter started their service on November 21st after attending PSO in Indianapolis.



Casey Burns will be serving with Milwaukee Public Schools and Parents Plus, Inc. Casey says, "I became a VISTA because I have always been involved in volunteering and I have always been interested in non-profit and social programs, hence my sociology degree. I want to gain skills that would help me in the future while, at the same time, feel as though I am making a difference."

Ellen Carpenter will be serving with the Madison Metropolitan School District, joining Becky Smith in working with bilingual families. Ellen

says, "I became a VISTA because I have thoroughly enjoyed my previous experience serving as an administrator for a student-led non-profit in college. I'd love to continue in the line of indirect service, to learn about public and non-profit work, further develop my thoughts about active citizenship, and surround myself with like-minded co-workers. I was attracted to this position because I have a strong belief in the importance of education on all levels. I really like the ideal that it takes a village to raise a child and feel that this position really is aligned with it. Putting all of myself into a great cause; serving to enhance the education of Madison's youth for a whole year as an AmeriCorps*VISTA sounds like a wonderful opportunity to learn and grow as an active citizen and to give back to a world in which I have been so privileged."

Welcome to VISTA life, Casey and Ellen; we look forward to getting to know both of you!

Collecting Family Involvement Data

By Ruth Anne Landsverk

The time and thought you give to measuring family involvement at your site can pay big dividends later in the school year and beyond. Initial measures, however simple, set a baseline and allow planners of future events or efforts to understand what was attempted, how it was received, and how to build on it. Simple evaluative data also allow you to claim success or progress in your partnership efforts. Here are some tips and tools to help you collect a few, straightforward measurements about which, how many, and how well families were involved.

Ideas for Measuring Family Involvement

- **Take attendance** at partnership events. Count heads, have a sign-in sheet, or, for online items, monitor site usage.
- **Ask!** Have someone take notes when you ask an audience what they liked or how it could be improved. Hand out very brief evaluations before participants leave. Post parent surveys online for easy access/return.
- **Use volunteers to collect data.** Ask students equipped with notepads or questionnaires to circulate among participants. Do spot check phone calls of families who attended an event or participated in an initiative.



- **Make it user-easy.** Feature tear-off corners of the school newsletter for families and post suggestion boxes at school entryways so families can easily offer feedback. Publish phone numbers and e-mail or Internet addresses frequently in school documents so families know how to comment and offer ideas.
- **Track progress.** Parents can record minutes in a daily reading log or write comments to the teacher in the weekly take-home folder. Teachers can track the rate of homework completed or how well students performed on report cards, tests, and assignments. The principal or school counselors can keep tabs on numbers or students disciplined or referred for behavior issues.
- **Hold a focus group session with families.** Meet with a small group of family members in a relaxed setting to explore more complex issues of quality or access to school information and events.
- **What are you evaluating?** Take some time to think about what you want to accomplish by doing an evaluation. Are you counting heads or discerning changes in attitudes? Polling opinion or gauging if learning occurred? Evaluations should be constructed to help you figure out if and how partnership goals were reached.
- **Post results of your evaluations.** The best way to make sure that people complete your next survey is to show them the results of the last one. This

very important step demonstrates to participants that their efforts (and yours) were worthwhile. Publicizing evaluation results – whether from a survey, anecdotally, or the suggestion box – also documents and creates a body of interest in your partnership goals.

Tools for Measuring Family Involvement

- **Sample surveys from DPI VISTAs.** On the DPI VISTA Google page: <http://sites.google.com/site/dpivista/project/resources-1/classic---family-school-community-partnership-vista-resources>
- ***School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*** (3rd edition), Chapter 9, Evaluate Your Partnerships, pp. 307-341.
- **Seeing is Believing: Promising Practices for How School Districts Promote Family Engagement** from the Harvard Family Research Project: <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/seeing-is-believing-promising-practices-for-how-school-districts-promote-family-engagement>

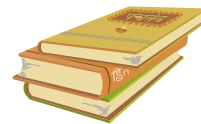
Keeping (and Staying) Busy during Lulls

By Casey Gauthier

It's cold and snowy (or at least it should be by now!) and there might be times where you find yourself with down time at work. There tends to be

ebb and flow to VISTAs' schedules especially around the holidays, so I've come up with some ideas for projects to work on in those "down" times, some of which you could do without being in your office.

1. **Prepare** for future projects. Do some brainstorming. Take time with research. When staff members are back and have some time, you will have plenty of ideas to run by them. Make a list of people to contact and possible partners for your idea.
2. Work on **grant research and writing**. Take some time to really delve into websites and find those not-so-obvious grant opportunities. Make sure you are eligible to apply for the grant, and even start writing it if you have time.
3. If you are spending some time in your office, but things are rather slow, use that time wisely to **clean and organize**. When work is hectic, piles of papers can build up and unnecessary items can get buried under them. File what you need. Pitch what you don't. When things are back in full swing, your workspace will be neat and tidy and you will be ready for anything.
4. **Catch up on reading**. The DPI VISTA Project considers knowledge of *Beyond the Bake Sale* and *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*



- quite essential for work. Both of these books can seem daunting, or even like a waste of time during busy weeks, but pull them out when you have time to really see what they are all about. Take some notes and do some highlighting so that you can easily come back to those pages.
5. Work on your **sustainability binder**. We ask all of our VISTAs to compile these before their service is complete, but who says you have to wait until your last few weeks? Start making copies of flyers, printing out agendas, and making notes so that a future VISTA/staff member/volunteer can easily start where you leave off.
 6. **Take a look** at your VAD, Asset Maps, Action Plan, etc. These are living documents that should always be up-to-date and applicable to your service. If you notice that they aren't, make some edits and consult with your supervisor about the changes you are making.
 7. **Keep networking** with other VISTAs, AmeriCorps members, and community resources. Though you are encouraged to do this in the beginning of your service, it's important to maintain those contacts and make new ones. Chances are if you are having down time at work, some of these other people might be too.

Save the Dates!



December 3-4:
The Heart of the Matter:
Building Safe and
Drug Free Schools
conference

December 17:
VISTA Monthly
Check-In

Recipe of the Month: Butternut Squash-Sweet Potato Ginger Bisque

This month, Sarah Glassman shares with us a recipe that she considers to be one of her very favorite dishes during the long and chilly fall and winter seasons.

Ingredients:

1 (2 lbs) butternut squash,
peeled, seeded, and cut into
chunks
4 sweet potatoes, peeled and cut
into chunks
1 (2 inch) piece
of ginger,
peeled and
finely chopped
3 cloves garlic,
peeled and
chopped
1.5 quarts of
vegetable broth
Salt and pepper to taste



Place the squash, sweet potatoes, ginger, and garlic in a large pot. Pour in enough broth to cover the vegetables. Bring to simmer over medium heat, and cook until vegetables are tender and can be easily pierced with a fork, approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

Remove pot from heat. Place soup in batches into a blender or the bowl of a food process. Pulse until smooth. Return soup to pot. Season with salt and pepper to taste. If necessary, reheat soup over low heat, but do not allow to boil. Serves 8. Enjoy!

Securing Holiday Gifts on a VISTA Budget

By Penny Bruskin

The winter holiday season is quickly approaching. As VISTAs, we are working hard to pull together all the resources, activities, event plans, and more this time of year. As we get excited to spend time relaxing



over the holidays, many of us are also feeling stressed about getting the right gifts for friends and relatives? How can we find extra funds from a budget that is already extremely limited?

Before we either spend all the money we can find or begrudgingly crank out the credit card, take a gander at the following list of inexpensive gift ideas:

1. Gourmet coffees (or teas) with a personal coffee mug

2. Journal with special inscription inside
3. Home baked bread or cookies (or other feel-good foods)
4. A basket or canning jar filled with special jams, jelly, or candy
5. Be on the lookout for discount bookstores; used books can be some of the best gifts!
6. Homemade art; a favorite quote over a patch of colored blobs works for even those us who are artistically disinclined.
7. Mix tapes or mix CDs; these are not just for middle/high school crushes.
8. Make a collage of special photos with old photos; printing new photos can be fairly pricey.
9. Buy some cheap wooden picture frames to decorate with stencils or other designs and include a favorite picture.
10. If you have a bit of extra money on your Quest card, use it for special food gifts!

If you have access to a local dollar or discounted items store, I would check this resource first. You may be surprised about all the amazing things that these stores offer! Best wishes for a fun holiday season that won't keep you stressed or financially-strapped the rest of your VISTA term.

Inspired by "63 Gift Ideas for Under \$10 - For Any Occasion of the Year!" by Michelle Jones.

<http://www.betterbudgeting.com/articles/money/63giftsunder10dollars.htm>

Sarah answers Kristine's questions

Sarah Glassman is serving with Maple Tree Elementary School and Parents Plus, Inc.



Kristine: What is the best thing about being at Maple Tree Elementary School?

Sarah: The location of my workspace! I share an office with the school's social worker, diagnostics teacher, and speech pathologist. The speech pathologist and I look similar, so for the first month or so of school, all the students who came in for speech would ask us if we were twins.

Kristine: Where have you lived, which place is your favorite?

Sarah: I was born in New York City and lived there for a year before my family moved to a suburb of the city in New Jersey. I grew up in the suburb, then went to college in Richmond, Indiana, which is right on the border of Ohio. I also spent a semester studying in France, during which I lived in Nantes, the Pyrenees Mountains, and Paris. I moved to Milwaukee in early August for my VISTA position. Milwaukee is definitely growing on me and has strong potential to become my

favorite city, but for now it's in second place to New York. I love the culture and uniqueness of New York.

Kristine: What is in your refrigerator right now?

Sarah: Broccoli, baby carrots, celery, various types of cheese, skim milk, half and half, orange juice, diet Snapple, soy sauce, stir-fry sauce, barbecue sauce, pumpkin beer, white wine, leftover quiche, homemade corn chowder, mayonnaise, butter, eggs, chocolate raspberry sticks, a pie crust, grape jelly, whipped cream, and pudding.

Kristine: What is your greatest fear?

Sarah: Not having the chance to complete at least one of my life goals before I die.

Kristine: Who are the members in your family, and what are they doing?

Sarah: My mom and dad are still living in New Jersey, but they work in New York City. My dad is a dentist, and my mom is his secretary. I also have a younger brother; he'll be turning 20 in early December and is a sophomore at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania.

Kristine: If you could travel anywhere, where would you go?

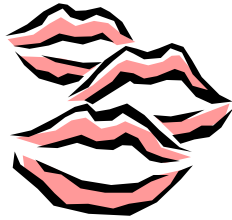
Sarah: I guess it depends on how much time I would have to spend at the location that I would travel to. If I had a lot of time to work with, I would want to go to Senegal, India, or Norway so I would have the opportunity to really soak in the cultures of those areas. If I had a shorter period of time to work with, then I'd want to go to Barcelona just so I can spend a day at the Salvador Dalí museum outside of the city.

Kristine: What is your favorite holiday?

Sarah: Halloween. I love how different cultures embrace the holiday, even though it is thought of as a traditionally American holiday.

Kristine: What was your major in college and why did you choose it?

Sarah: I majored in Comparative Languages and Linguistics. I went to college as an intended psychology major, but decided it wasn't a good fit for me because of the competition for individual attention from professors that was caused by the popularity of the field. I've been speaking French since I was nine years old and enjoyed it, but thought that a major in French would be too restrictive for post-college job opportunities. I had wanted to learn Spanish for a little while at that point (I couldn't take up Spanish in high school without giving up French), and I found this major as the perfect opportunity for me to keep up with my French while learning Spanish. I didn't know much about linguistics before I declared my major, but I quickly became enamored with the field of sociolinguistics.



Kristine: What are your plans for life after VISTA?

Sarah: I recently decided to apply to graduate schools so I can pursue a career as a French teacher. I'm almost done with my application for UWM and will most likely apply to University of Delaware and Montclair State University too.

Kristine: How are you going to spend your free time in the coming winter months?

Sarah: I just booked a trip East to visit my friends and family in that area from December 23rd to January 2nd. I'm looking forward to this trip, since I haven't seen my family since early August. My mom has a pair of snowshoes that I'm thinking about taking back to Milwaukee with me to try out on some of the bike trails. I'm also planning on giving people homemade gifts for the holidays this year, so I'll be spending some time on those. Otherwise, I'm planning to stick to my normal routine of going to the gym, passing out on my futon, then making dinner while watching terrible TV shows. However, there may be an increase in hot chocolate consumption and movie watching.

Kristine answers Sarah's questions

Kristine Nadolski is serving with the Wausau School District.



Sarah: Describe the town you grew up in.

Kristine: I grew up in Menasha, which is part of the Fox Cities and is sandwiched between Appleton and

Neenah. It is very residential with an old downtown and is on the north end of Lake Winnebago. It is small enough that I knew everyone in my class in high school, and the surrounding area is big enough that there was usually something to do. My dad was a teacher at the high school so it feels like my family knows everybody in town. As a kid it was great because there are lots of parks and my friends lived blocks away. When I left for college I was ready to be in a bigger city, but I'm appreciating Menasha more now that I'm not there.

Sarah: How did you usually spend your summers as a kid?

Kristine: My parents were both teachers so I was very active in the summer and we did a lot as a family: swim lessons, fishing, playing softball, going to the beach, going to the park, bike rides. Playing dress up with my sister and the neighbors in our front yard was my favorite thing to do. My family always spent a week "up north" (Manitowish Waters and St. Germain) in a cabin on a lake with my cousins. This vacation was the best part of the whole summer and I wish we were still able to do it.

Sarah: What was the last book you read that you thoroughly enjoyed?

Kristine: The Mists of Avalon. It took me a year to read because I was busy with school and only read it over breaks. It's also massive. I just finished it in July and haven't read anything great since then.

Sarah: How do you usually deal with stress?

Kristine: It's not pretty. I eat and stay up late and do crazy things I

wouldn't normally do and usually end up calling my mom. To point out, this was how I dealt with stress throughout college during exams. I haven't experienced those levels of stress since school ended. I would



like to think now I would take a bath and read a book to relax.

Sarah: If you could travel anywhere in the

world, where would it be?

Kristine: I would go to Japan. I studied Japanese for twelve years and was never able to travel there while studying it.

Sarah: How will you be spending the holidays this winter?

Kristine: Over-eating with my family. I'm spending Christmas with my family in Menasha and will probably make my way to Kenosha to spend time with my boyfriend's family as well.

Sarah: Who performed at the last concert you went to and when was it?

Kristine: I saw Cage the Elephant and Third Eye Blind on State Street in Madison on Halloween.

Sarah: Can you share a valuable lesson that you've learned since you became a VISTA?

Kristine: Communicate with your supervisors. They really know how things work within your site and community and have contacts with important people. My supervisors paved the way for me to invite people to be on our Action Team. They spoke to the people they

thought would be interested in the program first and then I followed up with specific information. It made it easier for me when people already had a heads up that I would be contacting them so it wasn't out of the blue that a stranger was talking to them.

Sarah: What sports do you follow?

Kristine: I follow Badger football religiously. I get ornery when I know I'm missing a game. I'll watch the Packers, Brewers and Badger sports when they're on but don't know a lot about players, stats, etc.

Sarah: What are your top three choices of ice cream flavors?

Kristine: Ben & Jerry's Peanut Butter Cup and Phish Food were an obsession of mine for a while. Normally I just go for whatever is chocolaty; I don't like vanilla ice cream.

"Hey! That's a Good Idea!" Corner



Stephanie Dorman, VISTA with the West Allis-West Milwaukee School District, made sure that parents unable to attend parent-teacher conferences didn't miss out! She put together packets of information to send home with students that included tips on talking to teachers, how to use the ParentPortal (a

district web program that allows parents to get information about their child's schedule, grades, attendance, missing assignments, etc.), information about WKCE testing, and a sign-up and information form for the Action Team.

COMMUNICATING

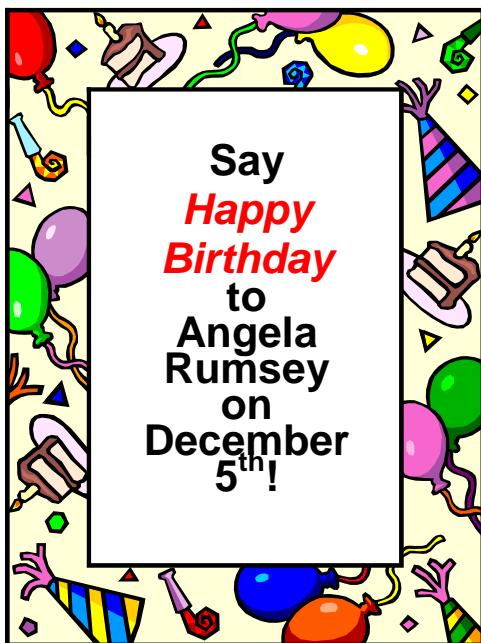
Erica Spurgeon, VISTA at Green Bay School District/UW Green Bay, is developing a volunteer binder that can be used next year by another VISTA or a volunteer. This binder includes information on details of the four schools in the district, information on the Phuture Phoenix program, and up-to-date contact information. **VOLUNTEERING**

Becky Smith, VISTA with the Madison Metropolitan School District, has been having a lot of success with the Dual Immersion parent group at Leopold Elementary School. Committees are taking form within the group, so that parents are coordinating and determining what happens during the meetings. So far, there are two committees: a "Conversation Partners" committee and a "Learning at Home" committee. **DECISION MAKING**

Brittany Williams, VISTA at Wisconsin Educational Opportunity Program, is calling upon a partnership she developed last year with Trees for Tomorrow in Eagle River. She is seeking out scholarship money so that a field trip can be taken up to Trees for Tomorrow in January. Students will be able to experience what the camp has to offer in the winter. An area group that donated money last year is willing to donate funds a second time around. **COLLABORATING**

Sara Byrnes, VISTA at Fond Du Lac Public Library, has recruited a volunteer for the Opportunity Center who works in the investment and banking industry. This new financial focus at the Opportunity Center will complement the Money Smart U program, which limits teachers to being outside of a related profession. The Opportunity Center can, thus, branch out its programs to cover financial planning in addition to other types of aid. **FINANCIAL PLANNING**

Lizzy Lowrey, VISTA at Racine Public Library, has been working on setting up a recovery-designated laptop to promote job search websites, social service websites and community organization links among other helpful tools. This laptop will enable individuals to access quality job sources online independently. **EMPLOYMENT AND JOB SKILLS TRAINING**



Building Capacity the VISTA Way

By Betsy Pruetter

We all know that building capacity is important for VISTAs. You serve for one year and you learn quickly that time is of the essence! Your sites are looking to you to advance the big picture and help improve the kinds of programs and services they are already offering. But remember, it's not only up to you. It's about helping the site and staff come together to boost their internal capacity. Public Allies, a well known AmeriCorps program, has developed and published strategies for increasing capacity at non profits (or schools, or libraries) based on research from the Uganda Community Management Program. Take a look at the ones featured below. Which ones does your site do well? Which ones might be ones to work towards?

1. Altruism

Individuals should be allowed and encouraged to use their gifts to benefit the organization. Is there something special you, a staff member, or community member (or a parent) really likes to do? Can it fit into your program of partnerships?

2. Common Values

Members need to share, or at least understand each others' values and attitudes to make a strong organization. Do you feel well connected to your site? Are you working to develop strong relationships with those you work with?

3. Communication

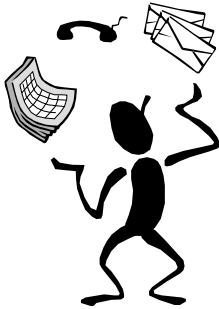
This doesn't mean only *speaking* to the families and staff you work with (though that's important!) but utilizing a variety of tools- email, newsletters, radio, internet, etc. And communication with site staff is just as critical. Do they know about the work you're doing? Do they know how to get involved with partnerships?

6. Organization

Each member of an organization needs to have a role in that organization. They should know what that role is and see how it fits in the "bigger vision." Do YOU know how your work fits into your site's "bigger vision"? Is there a mutual feeling of sense and purpose among staff?

7. Skills

Use your assets! And the assets of those you work with. Find out what people are good at and utilize those skills for the benefit of your site. Think back to your resource mapping- what special talents or skills do staff have at your site?



Remember to look for those "unusual suspects" and tap into the assets that we all possess!

8. Trust

Trust in each other and in your site is essential to a strong agency. VISTAs should be building trust with those they work with in an effort to do their work more effectively! This also helps develop sustainable practice. Has your site engaged in any team building activities?

9. Unity

Establishing a culture of tolerance in the workplace will increase capacity. You should be celebrating the differences and similarities you share with those you work with as well as those your site serves. How might this be a theme to your next partnership event?

VISTAs in the News



Jim Handorf,
Madison Public Library
"Madison Public Library adds second day for job help workshops"
http://host.madison.com/wsj/news/local/govt_and_politics/article_f3574690-c41b-11de-8e23-001cc4c002e0.html

Anna Morgen and Casey Gauthier,
School District of Rhinelander
"YMCA Diversity Day"
http://www.wjfw.com/print_story.html?SKU=20091107175754

Josh Cowles and Sara Byrnes,
Fond du Lac Public Library
"Library offers employment help"
<http://www.fdlreporter.com/article/20091117/FON0101/911170339/1985/Library-offers-employment-help>

Grant Opportunities



AMA/Leader to Leader Institute: Scholarships

The American Management Association (AMA) and Leader to Leader Institute scholarship program assists social-sector nonprofit organizations in developing strong leadership. The scholarship is designed to give nonprofit leaders an opportunity to step out of the day-to-day, interact with peers across sectors, and develop practical skills they can apply immediately within their organizations. Maximum Award: one-year scholarship. Eligibility: employees of 501(c)(3) organizations with a minimum of 3 years of work experience in the social sector.

Deadline: December 15, 2009.
<http://leadertoleader.org/collaboration/ama/index.html>

IMLS: Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program

The Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program supports efforts to recruit and educate the next generation of librarians and the faculty who will prepare them for careers in library science. It also supports grants for research related to library education and library

staffing needs, curriculum development, and continuing education and training. Maximum Award: \$1,000,000. Eligibility: all types of libraries, except federal and for-profit libraries. Eligible libraries include public, school, academic, special, private (not-for-profit) archives, library agencies, library consortia, and library associations. Institutions of higher education, including public and not-for-profit universities and colleges, also are eligible.

Deadline: December 15, 2009.
<http://www.imls.gov/applicants/grants/21centuryLibrarian.shtm>

NEA: The Big Read

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts to restore reading to the center of American culture by providing citizens with the opportunity to read and discuss a single book within their communities. The initiative includes innovative reading programs in selected cities and towns, comprehensive resources for discussing classic literature, and an extensive website providing comprehensive information on authors and their works. Maximum award: varies. Eligibility: literary organizations, libraries, and community organizations across the country.

Deadline: February 2, 2010.
http://www.neabigread.org/application_process.php

Toshiba/NSTA: ExploraVision Awards

All inventions and innovations result from creative thinking and problem solving. The Toshiba/National Science Teachers Association ExploraVision Awards Program encourages kids to create and explore a vision of future technology by combining their imaginations with the tools of science. Maximum award: \$10,000. Eligibility: students K-12.

Deadline: February 2, 2010.

<http://www.exploravision.org/about/>

Western Union Foundation: Family Scholarship Program

The Western Union Foundation's Family Scholarship Program is an educational initiative for migrants, immigrants, and their families in the United States that aims to help two members of the same family move up the economic ladder through education. Scholarships may be used for tuition for college/university education, language acquisition classes, technical/skill training, and/or financial literacy. Maximum award: \$5,000. Eligibility: two members of the same family, aged 18 years or older, for whom the country of origin for at least one applicant is outside the U.S.

Deadline: February 5, 2010.

<http://corporate.westernunion.com/scholarship.html>

ING: Unsung Heroes Awards

The ING Unsung Heroes Awards program recognizes innovative and progressive thinking in education through monetary awards. Maximum award: \$25,000. Eligibility: full-time educators, teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, or classified staff members with effective projects that improve student learning at an accredited K-12 public or private school.

Deadline: April 30, 2010.

<http://www.ing-usa.com/us/stellent2/groups/dc/documents/companylobinformation/001143.pdf>

Barnes and Noble Grants

Barnes and Noble booksellers is considering requests for grants from nonprofit organizations that focus on art, literacy, or education (K-12). Applicants must have a plan for promoting the grants program with Barnes and Noble and must be willing to work with the local stores on in-store programming. Maximum Award: varies. Eligibility: nonprofits that focus on art, literacy, or education (K-12).

Deadline: rolling.

http://www.barnesandnobleinc.com/our_company/sponsorship/Sponsorship_main.html